

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: VIRGINIA MANSINON, Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard
account clerk

Virginia Mansinon, Filipina-Portuguese, was born in Kakaako, October 31, 1926. Her father came from the Philippines in 1911; her Portuguese mother was from Maui.

Virginia attended Pohukaina Elementary School and danced the hula in Lei Day programs there in the 1930's. She also did Filipino dancing at various plantations, under the direction of Mrs. Ligot, wife of the Filipino Commissioner of Labor, Cayetano Ligot. She also attended Washington Intermediate and McKinley High Schools.

While still in school, she worked as a housemaid for University of Hawaii professors. She also helped out in the small family grocery store run by her mother, which was adjacent to her father's pool hall.

She worked for W. A. Ramsey, Ltd., at the time of her marriage in 1947. She was later employed at the Naval Shipyard, where she continues to work today. She and her husband currently reside in Kahaluu.

TIME LINE

1926	birth: Kakaako
1931	attended Muriel Kindergarten
1938	became a Protestant
1940	worked as housemaid
1947	married
1953	left Kakaako

TAPE NO. 3-44-1-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Virginia Mansinon (VM)

Kahaluu, Oahu

March 17, 1978

BY: Gael Gouveia (GG)

GG: This is an interview with Virginia Mansinon in Kahaluu. And the date is March 17, 1978. Okay. I thought maybe we could start if you want to tell me where you were born.

VM: I was born in Honolulu, October 31, 1926.

GG: And what area of Honolulu?

VM: In the area of Kakaako district near the old Aloha Theater on Queen Street. Where the American Sanitary Laundry is located.

GG: Were you born at home?

VM: Yes, in an apartment house, apartment building. I can't seem to remember the number of the building and I believe it's already torn down.

GG: That wasn't Magoon Block by any chance was it?

VM: I don't remember whether it was Magoon Block or another little block adjacent to the laundry.

GG: Did the Magoons own it or do you recall?

VM: Yes. the Magoons owned that.

GG: I see. But you were born in sort of an apartment building...

VM: Yes, that's right.

GG: ...complex rather than in one of the cottages behind Magoon Block. Okay, and can you tell me now how your parents happened to be living in Kakaako at that time?

VM: Well, they had arrived from Maui. They were originally in Maui. They met in Maui. They got married there. And a year later they moved to Honolulu. And about a month later I was born.

GG: Oh, my goodness.

VM: So I was almost born in Maui, Paia. But instead because we moved to Honolulu.

GG: Did they move directly to Kakaako from Maui?

VM: I believe they did. My grandparents, however, were residing in Kahuku at the time. And then they too finally, later on, moved out to Kakaako, so that all the family were close together.

GG: Do you recall at all how they happened to decide on Kakaako?

VM: No, they never talked about it.

GG: And what kind of work was your father doing at that time?

VM: I don't remember what he was doing at the time I was born. But in Maui he was working in the plantation hospital, I think, as an orderly, before they came to Honolulu. Before working for the hospital he was an interpreter for the Sugar Planters' Association.

GG: Did your mother have a midwife when you were born?

VM: Yeah, she did have a midwife. Of the 11 children that she had, nine were by midwife and two--the last two--was born...in the local hospital, Kapiolani.

GG: Do you know now since she'd only been in the Kakaako area about a month, did your parents have friends there or how did she find a midwife? You know, having just come from Maui.

VM: Somehow at the time, as I recollect, whenever a new family moved into the vicinity everybody came to welcome them. And I guess that's how my parents got friendly. And the women there probably recommended a nice midwife. It's not how it is today, you know, where everybody tends to their own. Everybody seemed to be concerned about a new family moving in. And you got to know each other and you help one another. If they didn't have food you gave them part of what you had. And that's what I could remember as a little girl.

GG: Right. Do you recall, again it would be from your own experience, but when they were living there do you know what kind of neighbors they had when they first moved there?

VM: Ah, yes. In the area along Queen Street but on Magoon Block the people there were predominantly Filipino, Portuguese, Hawaiian, Chinese, and Japanese.

GG: Do you recall, now, what kind of a midwife your mother had?

VM: Portuguese.

GG: Portuguese. Were there Filipino midwives there, too?

VM: I don't recall. Most of the midwives that I remember were mostly Portuguese. The only other midwife my mother had, besides the Portuguese one that attended her when I was born, was a Japanese midwife. And that was much later when I was a teenager. My mother was still having her children with a midwife attending her. She was Japanese.

GG: Was she in Kakaako still at that time?

VM: Yes, in another locality right in Kakaako.

GG: Right. I wonder, could you sort of tell me about the succession of moves that you had in Kakaako and describe the area and the neighbors in the different places that you lived in Kakaako.

VM: I can't recall every move, especially the moves that were made when I was a toddler. I can't remember those moves. I do remember living in the back of Magoon Block in one of the cottages. They were duplex cottages. My grandmother lived on one side. That's when she moved out from Kahuku to Kakaako. She lived on one side. And we lived on the other. And this way, we shared one kitchen in the back of the duplex. I remember us living there in those cottages.

GG: Did it have indoor bathroom facilities there?

VM: Yes, there were already indoor bathroom facilities. The kitchen was to one side of a long room and the other end consisted of the bathroom and laundry area, shared by the tenants of the duplex cottage.

GG: Do you remember your neighbors?

VM: Yes. I remember there were Hawaiian neighbors. Some lei sellers. There was some Japanese neighbors. Some Filipino neighbors. Portuguese neighbors. I even recall some of the neighbors making their own beer.

GG: Did they share it with each other after it was made?

VM: No. I believe each family made their own. Whether they sold it or not, I don't know. But I remember as a girl, I did have beer at the table. I don't know whether it was purchased or made by my mother or someone else. There were lei sellers next door, I remember. As a little girl, I learned how to sew leis. Just helping out you know.

GG: Do you know where they got their flowers from?

VM: Some of them got it from their relatives who had flowers growing in their yard. Some bought their flowers from the local graveyards that had a lot of plumeria trees. Where they got their carnations and other flowers I don't recall. They might have come from the nurseries.

GG: Did they make leis primarily for Boat Day at that point?

VM: Yes, it primarily was for Boat Day because at the time I don't recall airplanes very much but I recall the boats, because, we used to, many times go down and meet the boats when some relatives or friends were coming in from the outside island. And it was quite exciting. We loved going down to greet the boats because the Hawaiian band was there and we had all this so-called divers that dived for coins. And then everybody throwing leis and flowers.

GG: Did you know any of the divers because I understand a lot of them were from Kakaako.

VM: As a little girl, no, but as I grew older one of my brothers-in-law was a diver when he was growing up. And those boys really made quite a bit. Some of 'em even brought it home to supplement the family's income.

GG: With the lei sellers now, can you tell me how they work? Did they get together to sew leis or did neighbors come in and help at all?

VM: Sometimes neighbors would come in and help. Just to talk along with them and then, as you talk, you help them out. They never asked for help. But you just sat and help along. I don't believe there was a lei association at that time. They (the lei sellers), I guess they sewed individually in their own homes and then went down to the piers. Whether they went together or individually I don't know, but at the piers they were all cordial and friendly with one another. Everyone got along with each other.

GG: Did many lei sellers live in Kakaako?

VM: Yes, many lei sellers lived in Kakaako.

GG: And then did they walk down to the...

VM: Yes. Many of 'em walked down because they weren't too far from the piers. Walking at that time was a joy for everyone, it seems.

GG: It was the main mode of transportation.

VM: Yes. Not everyone could afford a car especially in Kakaako.

GG: Right. Did you folks have a car at that time?

VM: No.

GG: This would've been when, like late 1920's or late 1930's?

VM: Mid-1930's. We didn't own a car till, I believe it was in the late 1930's.

GG: What was your father doing? What kind of work was he doing at this point?

VM: At that point he was working for the WPA [Works Progress Administration] at Ala Moana as a watchman. We were able to afford a car because my mother (won) a sweepstakes.

GG: Oh, my goodness.

VM: She won \$500. And at that time it was quite a bit of money.

GG: How did that happen?

VM: Well, it's funny because when my dad bought the ticket, you see, money was hard to come by at that time. So when he bought the ticket, I believe it was just for---I don't know whether it was for 50 cents or \$1.00. But I remember when he came home that night, 'cause he worked at night. I always stayed up to watch my mother iron or do her housework and I kept her company, my being the eldest. And I remember her getting so very angry with him because the money (he bought the ticket with) could have been used to buy food or clothing, you know. She was so angry. He said he never spent money foolishly, and that was his own money that she allowed him to have. He had saved up. My dad always saved his pennies, you know. I remember his saving his pennies in his shoes.

GG: Oh, for goodness sake.

VM: And he used to complain about his feet hurting. We didn't realize till much later that it was because he saved his money in his shoe. (Laughs)

GG: He was walking around on his money. (Laughs)

VM: But that way, he thought, no one could steal it because it was with him. And no one would know it was in his shoe. But anyway (getting back to the subject of the sweepstakes ticket), she got very angry with him. He didn't argue back. And he had the ticket made out in her name.

GG: Who did he buy it from? Do you know?

VM: No. I don't know who he bought it from, how he came about to buy it. He never said. Until this day he never say who he bought it from. I guess it was somebody who approached him while he was working at the park. But when my mother won, oh my goodness, she was so happy! (Laughs) And he says, "Oh, you're not going to scold me 'cause you won." He said, "Don't you think I deserve some of it?"

She says, "Well, now I guess you can go out and buy a car."

And it was quite a thing 'cause we waited, we were, oh, with such anticipation. We were going to have a beautiful car. But when he came home we heard this chug-a-lug, chug-a-lug, chug-a-lug (Laughs) on the road. When we looked out of the window my mother said, "Oh, no!" It was a Model-T Ford. (Laughs) She expected something else. And we said, "Oh, no. We didn't want a Model-T. We wanted something much more fancy." But that's all he could afford. She had given him (part of the money) because I believe she put the rest away for a rainy day.

GG: Do you remember now what year it was that you got that car?

VM: No, I guess it was in the mid-1930's. I just don't remember the year.

GG: And it wasn't a new car then?

VM: It wasn't a new car. It was a used car. My dad always loved those models, so he went out and got what he wanted. (Laughs) He was pretty thrilled with it. And I enjoyed riding it. But some of my sisters, brothers, were ashamed to ride in the car.

GG: How many children were in the family at that time?

VM: At that time, let's see, there were five of us.

GG: Could you all fit in the car with your mom and dad at one time?

VM: No, it didn't have a rumble seat. There was just one small section right in the back of the driver--a passenger seat. We were little so my sister sat in the back. Whenever we passed some of her friends she would hide because she was so ashamed to ride in the Model-T. I thought it was fun.

GG: And so did he take turns taking you folks for a ride then, sometimes?

VM: Yes, he---every weekend he would go out to the country to Waipahu because he had relatives there. And we'd go out visiting. You know, before that time we couldn't visit relatives because we never had a car. So, that was our outing, to go and visit relatives out in the country.

GG: Did neighbors come out to see the car when you got it, too?

VM: Oh, yeah. They thought it was quite something to own a car. No matter what kind of car it was.

GG: So most of the neighbors didn't own at that time either?

VM: No, no. Of course there were one or two that had lovely cars. They could afford it because they had good, steady jobs.

GG: When you got the car where were you living at that time?

VM: At that time we were on Coral Street. Coral and Pohukaina. Near the Pohukaina Elementary School. And adjacent to our area that we were living, was a bakery there called the New England Bakery. There was also Mother Waldron Park close by. And also another park like a large, vacant lot with a wooden fence all around.

GG: Was that what they called Atkinson Park?

VM: That's right. Which now has all the industrial buildings--American Factors and some of the other big companies.

GG: What were the parks used for at that time?

VM: Mostly ball games. The big Atkinson Park was the one the big ball teams and baseball teams used to come out to. At Mother Waldron Park, many ball games were held there too. Basketball, baseball. It was just grass and dirt at one time you know, it wasn't the way it is now. Then after awhile, they fixed it up and we were then able to skate because it was cement. They also had courts for handball. And for volleyball. So we had a nice place to play. The Mother Waldron Park was also used for political rallies. We also played on the school-ground. But we had to be very careful not to pick the flowers. (Laughs)

GG: Why was that?

VM: They didn't want us to pick the flowers. They wanted the flowers to grace the yard, you know. So we were told we could play in the yard but don't pick the flowers.

GG: Were kids pretty good about listening at that point?

VM: Oh, some of 'em, yeah. Some of 'em decided, well, they were going to pick the flowers anyway to make leis or put in their hair. And then they would be turned in. Monday they would be called into the office because somebody snitched on them and said that so-and-so caught picking flowers.

GG: And then what would happen to them if they were caught picking them?

VM: They were just scolded and told never to do it again.

GG: The house that you were living in there by Pohukaina School, what was that house like? Do you remember?

VM: It was an old, wooden structure. The floors had large cracks on it. The boards weren't brought together. They were all about half inch cracks. So it was rather cold at night. But my mother tried to keep it warm by putting a mat on the floor or something.

GG: Where did she get her mats? Were these lauhala mats?

VM: No, no, no, no. These were straw mats, that you'd even see being used today. They even had straw mats then but they were very narrow at the time. Some Japanese would give their mats away to the neighbors.

GG: The Japanese made them?

VM: Uh huh, uh huh. And then when we could afford it, then she bought linoleum. Put it on so that it would cover all the cracks. The walls were all right. The windows had screens on them, so it was fine. We had good ventilation. When it was cold we closed it.

GG: Were the roads still dirt roads at that time?

VM: No, at that time they were already paved. Sidewalks were not paved, so they were dirt sidewalks.

GG: And were you attending school?

VM: During my kindergarten year I attended Muriel Kindergarten. That's on Laniwai Street near the mission. Hawaiian Mission. And then for my elementary school grades I attended Pohukaina School, from first to sixth grade.

GG: And were you living across from Pohukaina School at that point?

VM: When I attended the Muriel Kindergarten we weren't living on Coral Street. We were on, I remember, on Queen Street. We had rented a house near the American Sanitary Laundry. It was not an apartment. It was a house. Nice little house next to a restaurant. I've forgotten what they called that restaurant. It was an Oriental restaurant owned by some Chinese I heard. It was across the old Aloha Theater. And that home was lovely! I thought it was nicer than the other house on Coral Street. It had no cracks on the floors.

(Laughter)

VM: And I thought we were pretty special. I don't know how much rent was at that time. I was just a little girl. And I remember living there when I attended Muriel Kindergarten. Then I also remember living on a house on Cooke Street between Queen and--excuse me--between Pohukaina and Queen. Somewhere along Cook Street, we lived in another lovely house. With no cracks on the floors.

(Laughter)

GG: You don't like cracks I gather? (Laughs)

VM: No, it's cold. It was cold. That's what I remembered about the cracks. That's why I didn't like it. But after we put linoleum over it, it was all right. It kept the wind out.

GG: Do you know why you moved a number of times? Was there a reason?

VM: I believe it was because of the rent. See, my father was out of work at the time we lived in those lovely homes. My mother worked in the American Sanitary Laundry. She also worked in the Tuna Packers. I remember, especially the Tuna Packers, because I remember the smell of tuna on her when she came home.

GG: Was it not where it is? It was on Auahi Street?

VM: It was on Auahi and Cooke Streets, not where it is now.

GG: What did she do there? What was her job?

VM: At the Tuna Packers, I don't know what her job was at the Tuna Packers. But at the American Sanitary Laundry she was a presser.

GG: I see. Who took care of the children when she was working?

VM: Well, at that time my dad remained at home because it was hard to get work.

GG: This was shortly after the depression.

VM: That's right. So, my mother had to work. I know we're going back.

GG: No, that's all right. (Laughs)

VM: I guess you can get the information....Anyway, I remember my dad staying home. I didn't like it very much.

GG: Why?

VM: Well, because he cooked the same meals over and over. He only knew how to cook one meal which was stew. (Laughs) And we had stew every day.

(Laughter)

VM: I got so tired of stew, but that's all he knew how to cook at the time. But, we survived. My mother worked very hard as I remember. And then when she was no longer working naturally we had to go to some place that was cheaper in rent. And I think that's why we moved.

GG: Were there other families, too, where the wife was working...

VM: Yes, yes.

GG: ...and the husband stayed home?

VM: At that time, yes, because there was work for women but no work for men. There was the American Security Laundry. There was the Hawaiian Tuna Packers. There was the California Packing Corporation. Pineapple. She also worked in the pineapple cannery. She worked for CPC for awhile. I loved those days because she'd bring home the cores of the pineapple. They were allowed to bring it home. Now they don't. Now they use it. At that time the pineapple workers could bring home all those cores, which were enjoyed by the children.

GG: Did she bring home enough, say, on one day so that all the children could have?

VM: Could have, yeah. They couldn't bring it home all the time. I think what they did was made sure that all the workers would (have a chance to) bring home some sometime. That's what I liked about her working in the pineapple company. Pineapple cores. (Laughs) I've always loved pineapple every since!

GG: Who ran the New England Bakery that you talked about?

VM: New England Bakery was owned by a Chinese family. I believe by the name of Wong.

GG: 'Cause where was it, say, in relation there was also See Kau Bakery I think.

VM: That was on Halekauwila.

GG: I see. That was a little ways away.

VM: Yeah. Those were the two bakeries there. New England was right around the corner from our house (on Pohukaina Street, across Mother Waldron Park) and we could smell the bread. Many times the baker would allow us to come in and watch how he would knead the dough, and also when it was ready to put into pans. He didn't allow everybody to come in. But being that we were neighbors and my mother asked him politely, he said all right. But we had to behave, and had to stand quite a ways. He didn't want us to touch anything. And so, that's how we watched him bake the bread. Then, of course, when the bread was coming out of the oven my mother always said we could go and buy a loaf of hot bread. We'd also run to the grocery for a nice block of butter. At that time we couldn't afford to buy a whole pound. It was always one or two blocks of butter.

GG: How big was a block?

VM: Oh, it was quarter of a pound.

GG: Oh, I see what you mean.

VM: Like it is now. We always bought just a block because we couldn't buy a pound. Not only because we couldn't afford it, but at that time we never had refrigerators. Everything was kept in a safe. We never had an icebox either. It was a safe, an upright one.

GG: With wire screens?

VM: Yeah, with wire screen for ventilation. And we'd keep the butter in a little container in cool water. You know. It'd keep it fresh and never melt.

GG: What did you do about meats then? Did you have to buy meats when....

VM: When we needed it. We could never keep meat over night without cooking it. So we only buy meats when we were going to have stew. We very seldom ate steaks. I don't remember eating steaks until I was married. Because with such a big family my mother had to---if she bought a piece of meat she had to either roast it or make stew. She'd put lots of vegetables, potatoes and pumpkin and carrots so that it would go a long way.

GG: Did you eat, say, more Portuguese style than Filipino style or more Filipino style than....

VM: It was more Portuguese style than Filipino style. Although my dad loved his Filipino food my mother could feed us more if she used the Portuguese

way of cooking. She did cook Filipino dishes once in awhile when my dad could get some chickens or some pork (from) relatives. Or when they killed the pig and everybody shared in the purchase of the pig. You know. Sometimes so many families got together and bought a pig.

GG: This would be in Kakaako--neighborhood people would get together.

VM: Yes, right in the neighborhood. Yeah.

GG: Where did they get the pig?

VM: I don't remember. I think they had to go out to the country to buy it. At that time I'd say out in Aiea or Waipahu or even Koko Head.

GG: And how did they get together and decide, well, let's do it this week or....

VM: I really don't know. And of course there was another way that they did it. They used to have Filipino clubs or organizations. They'd use it as means of raising money. Fund raising. They'd kill a pig and then sell it by the pound. They'd go around the neighborhood to get orders.

GG: Would they just cook it in Filipino style first and then sell it?

VM: No, no. They sold it. Raw. By the pound, you know. And people would come and get it. Or they would make deliveries. They also slaughtered goat. They do it (fund raising) that way, too. These little clubs or associations would do that.

GG: Were there any of those clubs active in Kakaako?

VM: My dad was the president of one. It was called Ti Inanama Ti Ili. I don't know what it means. It's a Filipino name. It was not a club of the Kakaako district. It had members from many areas in Oahu. And their meetings were held in a club, somewhere on Emma Street. I remember that.

GG: Do you remember what the organization was for?

VM: It was to help the immigrants from the Philippines who were working here as plantation workers. They were saving their money through the organization. And when they were ready to go back to the Philippines they had enough money to go back. Many of them had families back in the Philippines. That organization is no longer in existence. It didn't last too long. I don't know. There was friction, you know. Eventually it was disbanded.

GG: Did very many people who belonged to it, indeed get to go back?

VM: Yes. Many, many did.

GG: Are you aware of any other organizations for Filipinos?

- VM: There were other organizations. I don't remember the names of them.
- GG: In that one, do you know off-hand was it like only for Ilocanos or only for Visayans or both?
- VM: That one was mostly for Ilocanos.
- GG: I see.
- VM: The Visayans have their own club. Some of them still have their clubs now.
- GG: And when did your father first come to Hawaii?
- VM: He came to Hawaii when he was 19 years old. I don't remember the year. [1911] He is now--my dad is now--let's see, he was born in 1892. So he is now--he'll be 86 this year.
- GG: Oh, my goodness. Is he still living?
- VM: Yes, he's still living.
- GG: I wonder, he must have been here, then, during the 1924 strike I think. Do you have any idea where he was at that time? Was he on Maui then?
- VM: He was on Maui at the time of the strike.
- GG: That was the Filipino strike.
- VM: Right.
- GG: In 1924.
- VM: He was then working for the plantation as an interpreter. I remember he told us some stories about it. It was very dangerous at that time. He, as an interpreter, was threatened. Yes, he was threatened. He thought many times that he would lose his life or get beaten up. He was very afraid at that time.
- GG: Is he living on this island?
- VM: Yes.
- GG: 'Cause we're working on a project primarily on Kauai, talking to old-timers that were there at the time of the 1924 strike.
- VM: My husband was born in 1925 so I don't think he remembers anything. His father is gone. Both his father and mother are deceased. They're from Kauai.
- GG: Oh, are they?
- VM: Yeah.

GG: Okay, well, maybe we better get back to Kakaako now. At school, do you remember now what kinds of things you played and who your friends were when you were in elementary school?

VM: Uh huh. Oh, I remember the games that we played. Whenever I watch some of the children nowadays I feel that they miss so much. 'Cause we used to make our own games many times, you know. I remember playing jacks with the girls during recess time. Rope, you know....

GG: Jump rope.

VM: Jump rope. And "master." A game that they call "Olivia." We used to fill up a bag.

GG: Oh, was that the Bull Durham bag?

VM: Yeah. Make it real hard and there would be someone chasing you with the bag. They would throw the bag at you, and if the bag would hit you, then you would be it.

GG: And that was called "master?"

VM: Master. Because there would be chasing each other. We also used the Olivia to play another game where you were in a block (court), you know. And they have people on two sides of the court trying to hit you with that. We did that with the ball, too. Oh, we'd try all kind of games. I remember, as a girl, I got spanking several times for cutting up my mother's broom.

(Laughter)

GG: To play pee-wee?

VM: Pee-wee. That's right.

(Laughter)

VM: And her brooms were still in good condition. The boys would say, "Virgie, go get your mother's broom." And I loved playing with boys, you know. In fact, I loved playing with the boys more than I did with the girls. I never cared for dolls. My sister loved dolls. But I loved playing boy games. Climbing trees was my favorite. I fell out of the tree several times but I'd always go back up again. And I loved swinging on the rope like Tarzan, you know, with the long rope and the big knot at the bottom. And we jump from---the rope is close to the fence that was around Atkinson Park. There were trees along the side. So we'd put some ropes hanging from one of the branches with a big knot at the bottom. And we'd swing from it and then land on the fence. And we'd jump as if we were Tarzan, you know. More like monkeys in the trees. But anyway, I loved to play agates. And I remember starting with just a couple of 'em and ending up with a big gallon of agates. And boys wouldn't play with me anymore because I was taking their agates away from them. We'd play fish or ring.

GG: How do you play fish?

VM: Fish? We'd make up--at that time there was not too much grass around the house, mostly dirt. We'd draw the shape of a fish on the ground and then we'd lay the agates right along the fish, the body of the fish. And then, you stand so many feet away and aim at that fish. I don't remember the rules to that game. Then another game that we played with the ring. We'd put a pile of agates in the center and we hit from the outside of the ring.

GG: Right. And you have to knock it out.

VM: Knock it out.

GG: Then you take it.

VM: Then you take it. And what other way? Oh, there were some other games that we played with agates. And we also made stilts, our own stilts.

GG: What did you make them out of?

VM: I'd take my dad's lumber. (Laughs) He had some underneath the house.

(Laughter)

VM: And I got spanking for that, too. Because he was keeping it to make chairs or things--make shelves that we needed in the house. But well, it was there so I used it. To make my own stilts. And we make our own little racing cars with orange crates. And wheels that we could get (Laughs) wherever we found it. We'd make our own little racing cars, you know, with the little rope to steer. Bar across the front.

GG: Right. And then did several kids have those and then you'd have races with them?

VM: We'd have races. We'd play on the street. We had races along the street. (Laughs)

GG: Not much traffic then?

VM: No. It was fun. We also played hopscotch on the street. We'd draw lines, you know. There was no sidewalks until they made that Mother Waldron Park. Then they had the hopscotch painted on, or something like that. But before that we used to play on the streets whenever we wanted to play hopscotch, jump rope, whatever.

GG: And did the boys generally not mind playing with you because you could keep up with them?

VM: As long as you could keep up with them they didn't mind.

GG: And were some of these your brothers or were they just kids in the neighborhood?

VM: They were kids in the neighborhoods. Around the same age. Some younger, some older.

GG: And did you go to school with them too?

VM: Yes.

GG: And do you remember what nationalities they were?

VM: They were Filipino, Hawaiians, Japanese, Portuguese.

GG: So that you all played together and was this like after school time that you played together?

VM: Yes. Uh huh. During school time the girls just played with the girls, boys played by themselves.

GG: And did you have chores at home that had to be done before you could go out to play?

VM: Yes, uhm. We all had chores.

GG: What kind of chores did you have?

VM: At home I helped my mother sweep or wash the dishes. Little chores that we could handle. I help her with ironing when I was a teenager, though. She used to take in ironing to supplement the income. And it was mostly uniforms from the keeper of the animal pound. The dog catchers were in Kakaako at the time. (Laughs) And they were near the Hawaiian Mission.

GG: Is there a difference between Hawaiian Mission and Kakaako Mission?

VM: I believe that's the same thing. I call it Hawaiian Mission but it should be Kakaako Mission. It (the Mission) was situated close to the dog catchers, the dog pound. They used khaki uniforms and so my mother used to wash all the uniforms. Starch it. And I used to iron them. We had this big iron--not the electric iron now.

GG: The charcoal?

VM: Charcoal irons. My grandmother used to be the one that heated it up. And I remember doing (the ironing) on the floor. On the blankets.

GG: Not even an ironing board.

VM: We got those things later on after we got older.

GG: What about washing machine now? How did she wash....

VM: Washing was done all by hand until I was working. When my sisters and I worked, then we got my mother all her electrical appliances. Before

then she couldn't afford those things because my dad was the sole supporter in the family. His money (earnings) went towards food and clothing and rent. Couldn't afford all those other luxuries.

GG: Can you tell me about the May Day programs at Pohukaina School, when you were in elementary school?

VM: Oh, yeah. Oh, they were wonderful. Every May Day we'd have a nice May Day program with the king and queen and her court. And everyone wore leis which they made themselves. We never bought leis. And we all wore holokuus or muumuus which our mothers made. We had nice, fabulous programs. Hula dancers and different kind of dances--folk dances.

GG: What kind of folk dances?

VM: Filipino folk dances. Japanese folk dances. Portuguese folk dances. And they paid the tribute to the court and the queen--king and queen for the day.

GG: Did the teachers work to teach all the children...

VM: Right.

GG: ...the different nationalities' dances?

VM: That's right.

GG: So it wasn't just like Portuguese children doing the Portuguese dance.

VM: No, we were all mixed. Maybe one class were going to do the Filipino dance. And another would be doing the Hawaiian dance. Or they would have--like when I was going to Pohukaina I was a hula dancer then. I had taken hula when I was nine years old from the Lalani Hawaiian Village in Waikiki. I always danced the hula on May Day because I was one of the hula dancers.

GG: How did your parents, how could they afford to give you hula lessons if money was tight?

VM: That was the pennies that my dad saved in his shoe. It was able to go towards the hula lessons.

GG: And did you enjoy it? Did you really like it?

VM: Not at the time. I did it because that's what my dad wanted me to do. And I think that's why I never became a professional dancer because I never really loved doing it. I did it to please my dad. At that time you never questioned your parents. They wanted you to do something, you did that. I wanted to learn to play the piano. And at that time he said he couldn't afford the hula lessons and the piano. So, it had to be the hula lessons because that's what he wanted.

GG: Do you know why that he wanted, or why he felt that the hula lessons were important?

VM: Well, the Filipino people at that time, were fascinated by the hula and they wanted all of their girl children to dance the hula, you know. It was during the later years that they realized there were more important things than hula, like piano and violin and all of that. You know.

(GG Laughs)

VM: And of course, later on, I would be able to take piano lessons. I only took a few lessons because my dad couldn't afford more than five lessons. And I remember they were 50 cents a lesson.

GG: Oh, my goodness.

VM: And that was quite a bit of money at that time.

GG: Right.

VM: And so I could only afford five lessons. After that I would have to just teach myself with what little I had learned. And to this day I can play a little piano but not very well. Just to suit myself. I won't play for anybody else. (Laughs)

GG: Were there other special times at school besides May Day when you had a special program?

VM: Yes. PTA meetings, we performed for the parents and the teachers.

GG: Was the PTA very active?

VM: Very active.

GG: This would've been in the early 1930's that you're talking about?

VM: Uhm. The parents and the teachers were very, very active. And we always performed for the parents. It depended upon the season of the year. If it was close to Columbus Day and they had meeting, we'd have a play that depicted Columbus and how he discovered America. Or if it was near Christmas, we'd have a Christmas play. Things like that.

GG: When you were in elementary school did you learn at all about Hawaii or the different immigrant groups or anything like that?

VM: No. It was mostly history--American history. You know, it's sad because I think that's what's lacking in the public schools. That they weren't taught the culture of the Hawaiian people or the Japanese or the Chinese. Until these later years. Now, I believe they are adding all of those things. But, I was very interested in Hawaiiana. And I took it upon myself to learn the language. A little bit about the language. And in a way I'm grateful that my dad had me taking hula because then that started me off in learning the Hawaiian words.

GG: Right. What about now, he is Ilocano, is that right?

VM: Uhm.

GG: Did he speak Ilocano?

VM: He spoke Ilocano only to his friends or relatives. I asked him to teach me the language when I was a little girl and he didn't want to. I asked him why. And he said he was afraid it would affect my English. But today he's sorry he never taught me because now he can't--he likes to converse. But he can't, not unless he meets one of his old friends.

GG: Now what about your mother? Did she speak Portuguese?

VM: Only to her mother. My grandmother....

END OF SIDE ONE.

SIDE TWO.

GG: Okay, we were talking about whether your mother spoke Portuguese.

VM: Uh huh. Well, my grandmother spoke the language. She spoke to us in Portuguese because we understood. And we answered her in English because she understood English. She couldn't speak the language--English language. So she spoke to us in Portuguese and we answered her in English.

GG: How did you understand the language?

VM: We grew up with my grandmother.

GG: Because was that all she ever talked....

VM: Yes. So we learned to understand but we never spoke it because English was predominantly the language in the home.

GG: So now do you still understand?

VM: Portuguese?

GG: Right.

VM: A little. Yes. Not too much.

GG: Do you speak it at all?

VM: No, because there's no one to speak it. No, very little.

GG: And do you understand Ilocano at all?

VM: No, because my dad never spoke it unless, like I said, he spoke it to friends or family. I used to read the Filipino newspaper to me. So I

can read the Filipino language fluently. I can't speak it but I can read it.

GG: You didn't understand what you were reading but you read it so he could....

VM: Uhm. And he taught me to pronounce it correctly. If I mispronounced it, he'd stop me and correct me. That's his way of relaxing when he came home from work. After he had his meal and his bath, he'd sit and he'd close his eyes and he'd tell me, "Baby, read." And I would read to him.

GG: And did you subscribe to the Filipino newspaper then?

VM: Uhm.

GG: Do you have any idea what that cost?

VM: No.

GG: That's interesting that he....

VM: I also sang Filipino songs. I also danced the Filipino dances.

GG: You had mentioned that before. How did you learn the Filipino dances?

VM: The Ligot family lived in Kakaako and Mrs. Ligot at the time had a group of girls. I was one of 'em. She taught us to do the dance and we'd go to the different plantations and perform for the plantation workers.

GG: Is this the [wife of the] Ligot that was the Commissioner from the Philippines?

VM: Yes.

GG: I see. Whereabouts did he live?

VM: On Queen Street. Queen and Cooke I think it was.

GG: And how many of you girls were....

VM: In the group? There was about six of us. Sometimes more. We'd start with a big group but eventually we moved down to a lesser number.

GG: And what age now were you when you were doing the Filipino dancing?

VM: I was about 10.

GG: And how long did you do that?

VM: About a year.

GG: And what plantations did you go to?

- VM: I remember we went to the Aiea plantation, Waipahu and out to Waialua. That's about it. I don't remember any others.
- GG: And when you were taken out there. Now, how did you get out to the plantations?
- VM: Mrs. Ligot provided the transportation. She'd take care of all that.
- GG: She had an automobile? Did she drive herself?
- VM: I don't remember if she drove but I knew there was enough automobiles to take the girls to and from. She made sure that we were all taken care of. And we got home at a reasonable hour.
- GG: Did you have special costumes?
- VM: Yes, she provided the costumes too.
- GG: And then where did you dance?
- VM: The plantation had recreation halls for their plantation workers. They also provided well for their plantation workers. Medically as well as recreation wise. There was always these club houses or recreation halls. And with a stage, you know, we were able to perform.
- GG: And then, now, would they put on like a whole evening or afternoon program and you were a part of the program?
- VM: That's right.
- GG: Or were you the whole program?
- VM: Sometimes we were the whole program. Sometimes we were part of it. It depends what the function was all about. And I can't remember what they were--whether they were meetings, whether they were fund-raising kind of a functions or whether they were plantation weddings. I know there were some plantation weddings. But they were for different purposes.
- GG: Did you folks get paid to do this or you just....
- VM: No. We couldn't pay for lessons and we were willing to learn. And so....
- GG: And so this was how you paid for your lessons.
- VM: That was it! Right. By performing. And she knew we couldn't afford our costumes so Mrs. Ligot was, well, they were well-to-do, so she provided all the costumes.
- GG: And do you still now remember the Filipino dances?
- VM: Some of them, yes, I do.

GG: Okay, how about--did you ever do things at Kakaako Mission? Or what role did Kakaako Mission--you mentioned it a couple of times--play in your sphere?

VM: Well, I attended some of their meetings that they had. The Christian meetings, you know, for young people. But I never really got involved because at an early age I was a Catholic. I was baptized as a Catholic. And I never became a Protestant till I was 12.

GG: Were your mother and father both Catholics?

VM: My grandmother and my father and my mother were Catholics. But then my father changed and became a Protestant. But that's not the reason why I was--I was searching for something. I was never satisfied about what I learned as a Catholic. And I always felt that I was lacking something. I knew about the Lord but yet it wasn't enough.

GG: Did they have Christian doctrine or did you only go to church--when you were a Catholic--did you only go to church on Sundays or how did you.... 'Cause I know they never had Sunday school per se.

VM: They had catechism.

GG: Oh, catechism.

VM: Catholic, you see.

GG: Did you go to catechism?

VM: I did go to catechism. And I did ask at Saint Agnes. Yeah. And I did ask questions and I was never, never satisfied with the answers I got. And as I grew up into a teenager and was attending Washington Intermediate, the Honolulu Bible Training School came to existence. I don't know how. But they offered classes to anyone who was interested in learning the Bible. And then that's when I decided, hey, perhaps this is the way I'm going to learn more about the Lord. And so I attended the Honolulu Bible Training classes that they had. This was held at--there's a building right next to the Honolulu Hale, the City Hall?

GG: Oh, yeah.

VM: There's a small, little building on the side. And this is where the classes were held.

GG: Did you go by yourself or did you go with friends?

VM: No, (by myself). Whenever I was interested in anything--I guess you'd call me a loner....I'd just go and search for what I wanted.

GG: Did your family encourage this kind of thing?

VM: My mother always encouraged me. She said, "Well, if that's what you want," she says, "go ahead," to go. I always had their permission.

(As long as what I wanted was constructive and healthy for me.) If they said, "no," then I wouldn't do it. I also attended the library quite frequently. I love to read. So I used to walk all the way to the main library from Kakaako to borrow the books I wanted.

GG: Did very many other people do this or are you aware of?

VM: There were some girls. Sometimes we would all go together. Most of time they didn't want to go because they say it was too far to walk.

(GG Laughs)

VM: But I loved walking so I used to go to the library. And I also did go all the way to town to pay my mother's electric bill. I remember that.

GG: You walked....

VM: All the way to Hawaiian Electric. That's the one on Richard Street. That was all in my chores.

(GG Laughs)

VM: I didn't mind because I'd go to the library too.

GG: Yeah. Now you went through Washington Intermediate. Was that, at that time, what grades?

VM: Seventh, eighth, and ninth. Then I went to McKinley High--10, 11, 12. I didn't finish because I became crippled at the age of 15. I was a sophomore at that time.

GG: Do you mind talking about what happened?

VM: No, no. I don't mind. It was a crippling disease known as sclerosis osteitis. It was an inflammation of the knee. My knee became very large and my muscles wasted away. It was very, very painful! Never averaged more than about an hour of sleep a day. I was 108 pounds. Went down to 79 pounds within a month. And I couldn't go to school so I stayed home for awhile.

GG: What did you do for medical facilities or doctor?

VM: My mother took me to the family doctor. And at that time most people who had that illness became crippled, bedridden. But I was determined not to. So I thank the Lord to help me. I had the Reverend of Kawaiahao Church come and visit me weekly and I would read the Bible. We'd pray together. And the doctor would, that was Dr. Lyle Phillips at the time, he said they did all they could for me. A lot of it would be up to me. Therapy was walking. I walked five blocks to the theater just so that I could exercise. I'd see a show (movie) and then walked home. My brother worked as the newspaper boy and that's how he provided for my theater ticket.

GG: And how often did you do that?

VM: When I was able to walk, well, I used to drag my leg and walk five blocks up and five blocks down (to and from the theater). I did that until I was able to walk a little better. Then I stopped going to the....

GG: Which theater was this?

VM: That was then the Kewalo Theater. I don't remember when they built it. But I was a teenager when it came up. For swimming we went down near the harbor, Honolulu Harbor. There was school down there. A special school for children with disabilities.

GG: With problems.

VM: Uhm.

GG: Yeah.

VM: It was called the Opportunity School. And there was a lovely beach there. So we'd go swimming. We'd go crabbing. We'd go pick limu, whatever.

GG: Did you go surfing at all?

VM: No, the boys would surf. The girls wouldn't surf. At that time only boys were surfing. Girls would go just swimming, pick limu or go crabbing.

GG: Were there other sports, though, that girls could participate in?

VM: Baseball. Uhm. The schools offered baseball and volleyball.

GG: Now you had mentioned before, too, I think that you were a maid in other people's houses in Makiki?

VM: Oh, yes. That's when I was a ninth grader in Washington Intermediate School.

GG: You were about 14, 13, 14 years?

VM: It was very difficult for my dad (being the sole supporter of a large family) and so I wanted to help out. I was old enough to work so I asked the girls' Counselor if she could find something for me to do. She said, "Oh, yes." So, there was a professor. There were two, well, husband and wife, who were both professors at the university. They had a strange name--Poppenfuss. I'll never forget that name because it's so odd. One was in botany, the other one was in zoology. And I worked for them during the ninth grade year and also the summer before I went into McKinley High as a sophomore. So I earned my own money to buy my clothing, my shoes and also pay for my book rental.

GG: Whereabouts did they live?

VM: They were residing on Dominis Street.

GG: Oh, Makiki.

VM: Not too far from Punahou School.

GG: How did you get from your house?

VM: Walk. I walked, well, when I was going to school. Right after school I'd walk.

GG: Oh, that's right, 'cause Washington....

VM: Yeah, and then after I did my work it was still daylight hours, so I'd walk all the way home.

GG: And what kind of work did you do for them? What were you expected to do?

VM: Well, it started out it was just light work. But I guess she realized that I could do more because I did a lot at home. So eventually I did quite a bit. I started out just cleaning, dusting. I ended up doing laundry, helping her in the kitchen and she taught me to cook certain things--certain desserts. I washed the dishes. I did more as I worked for her longer.

GG: Do you recall what your pay was at that time?

VM: Very small. I don't recall, but it was so little for the work I did. I felt it wasn't enough. But I never asked for more. I can't remember what it was. Perhaps my mother remembers but....

GG: And you didn't get raises?

VM: No. Never.

GG: Were there other girls from Kakaako who were working as house maids in other places?

VM: Yes, uh huh. Even my sister worked as a maid when she was old enough. In fact she was younger than I when she started. She worked for one of her teachers. She was very unhappy though, but it was a way of earning some money. My brother always shined shoes and sold newspapers. That was his way of earning.

GG: Where did he shine shoes?

VM: In Honolulu. Downtown Honolulu, along Fort Street, King, Bishop. He sold the Sentinel. Never sold the Star-Bulletin or the Advertiser. He sold the Sentinel and he always went to the office buildings.

GG: I see.

VM: He went up to the different office buildings and he sold all his newspapers. Then he'd go shine shoes.

GG: Very enterprising family you had. All of them hard workers. Now you also mentioned that your mother had a grocery store and your father had a pool hall. Can you tell me more about that?

VM: Yeah. Rose Grocery was the name of the store.

GG: And whereabouts was it?

VM: That was on Cooke Street. When we first opened up it was Cooke and Pohukaina. It was right next to another Japanese grocery store. I've forgotten what the name of that store was. And then later on we moved further down Cooke Street closer to Auahi and it was still Rose Grocery and we added a pool room adjacent to it. My dad took care of the pool room. My mama and I took care of the grocery store. But eventually we had to close up because a lot of people around that area used to charge. And we had difficulty collecting from them. When they did have money they'd go and spend their money in their Japanese grocery stores--the Japanese markets. When they didn't have money they'd come over to our grocery store. Eventually we weren't getting money in, you know (we weren't being paid), we went bankrupt I guess.

GG: Oh, boy.

VM: Yeah, we had to close down.

GG: Well, can you tell me, do you remember what year or approximately what year that they opened; that you opened the grocery store?

VM: It was in the 1930's, 1935 I think it was.

GG: You must have had to get capital together in order to open the grocery store. Or how did you go about it?

VM: I don't remember how my dad and what my mother did. Probably with the little money she saved from that sweepstake because I remember her saving some of that money. And maybe that's how she got started. I don't know. I never found out.

GG: And then did you live up in an area attached to the grocery store?

VM: When we first started--no. We didn't live adjacent to the grocery store. But when we moved to the second location then we lived right in the back of the grocery store. Because there was a little, small, little two-room apartment.

GG: And how many of you were living?

VM: Very crowded. Oh, boy. I'm telling you. It was very unhappy. It was so crowded 'cause we were all growing up at the time, you know. When we were little, (being crowded) wasn't so bad. When you're a teenager.... Like some privacy; not very much when you only have two rooms and the bathroom was a separate room from the apartment. The kitchen was separate too. Two ends of the building--one end was with bathroom, the

one at the other end was kitchen. In between was these two rooms which were our bedrooms and there was no living room at all. Because my mother and father thought, well, it didn't matter 'cause they were so busy working in the grocery store and the pool room. See, the pool room first was owned by someone else. And then I don't know what happened. Then my dad took over. And most of the time the money was coming in from the pool room. We were making more money at the pool room than we did with the grocery store.

GG: Did you ever go into the pool room?

VM: No, the only time I went into the pool room was when my dad closed up.

GG: Oh. (Laughs)

VM: Then he would say, "Well, you want to play a game with me?" "Yes." So I'd go play pool with him. But as long as it was open for business I was never allowed. There was a little section cut off between the pool room and the grocery store. When my dad wanted something, I just handed it to him through the little cubby hole.

GG: Do you know what kind of clientele he had or who came to the pool room?

VM: Most of the men that came to the pool room were Filipinos and Hawaiian.

GG: And was it open all day? Did they play at all hours?

VM: As long as he had a lot of men there he'd keep open. But on days that was slow he would close at night because then the electric bill would go up. If he kept it open and if there was nobody then he wouldn't be making money. He felt it would be best to close up, turn off the electricity.

GG: And in those days now was it just strictly a pool room where they played pool or could they get beer or drinks?

VM: No beer. Just pool room. The only things they got was a soft drinks from our grocery store.

GG: Did they gamble at all there, too?

VM: If they did I didn't know.

GG: And did they ever have fights there or did people hang around outside?

VM: We never had fights in our pool room. And they never loitered outside because my dad always told them to come into the pool room. And he had benches around where they could sit and watch the game but he never wanted them to loiter around outside the pool room or outside of the store.

GG: And then in the grocery store now you and your mother pretty much ran it or did you have other help too?

VM: No, just my mother and I.

GG: And what kind of merchandise did you carry in the grocery store?

VM: We never had meats. We just carried can goods. Rice, flour, potatoes. Some vegetables. Soft drinks. And that was it. No meats.

GG: How did she get her supplies or where did she get those supplies from?

VM: Through the T. H. Davies. We did all the buying through T. H. Davies.

GG: And then did they deliver or did you have to go pick up?

VM: There were times when I had to go pick up 'cause they were situated near Kakaako. Several blocks I'd walk. If it wasn't too much I'd walk and get it. But if it was quite a bit then my dad would go get it. He still had his Model-T.

GG: Had it for a long time, huh?

VM: He did. (Laughs) Yeah. Eventually he had to pay someone to tow it away.

(Laughter)

GG: And now it would be worth a fortune.

VM: Yeah.

GG: How large was the area of the grocery store?

VM: The grocery store was very, very small. It was just half the size of this room. How big is this room?

GG: Maybe like what--8 by 10, or 9 by 12?

VM: About that.

GG: Something like that?

VM: Uh huh. The pool room was as long as this. You know. because he had two pool tables.

GG: Oh, the pool tables were already there when he took over the place.

VM: Yeah, he had bought. Yeah, when he took over. I don't know how he did it.

GG: And how did you have the grocery store set up? Did you have a lot of shelving?

VM: We had shelves. Mostly shelves against the wall. And shelves, maybe two or three shelves lined up. And the canned goods. And the rice was

kept in its original 100-pound bags and then people would come and buy by the pound. We had to weigh it on a scale, you know. And same thing with the flour and the potatoes.

GG: Did you ever have trouble with flour if it had like bugs in it, could you...

VM: No.

GG: ...return it to T. H. Davies?

VM: We never had trouble with the flour then. As long as I can remember the rice never had bugs, the flour never had bugs. We never had trouble with weevils. Never had trouble. And then people made a lot of their own bread. So the flour would be moving a lot. So did the rice. We never had trouble with that. And the potatoes.

GG: And where would she get the vegetables--from T. H. Davies, too?

VM: I don't know how she got her vegetables. I can't remember if there was a vender that came around and sold it to her or she got it from someone who had vegetables planted. But I know there was a few--like head cabbage, carrots, potatoes, turnips, round onions. No green onions though. We never carried green onions. We never carried that leaf cabbage or won bok or whatever. Never. It was always a round cabbage and things that lasted kind of long.

GG: Did you folks ever grow a vegetable garden any place you lived?

VM: I did. I did when we were living on Coral Street and I was attending Pohukaina Elementary. I had a little victory garden at that time. My dad started it for me. I wanted (a hobby of some kind). I had very, tiny, little beds. I think they were no larger than 6 by 3 or 4 inches. Two little beds like that. And I had carrots, lettuce. And he had a fence around. And I had string beans on the fence. I had it for quite awhile.

GG: This was before the war?

VM: It was before the war.

GG: Did you ever have chickens?

VM: My mother had chickens when we were living on Queen Street, behind Magoon Block.

GG: Oh, yeah. In the cottage.

VM: She had chickens then. And also in that house near the American Sanitary Laundry. Next to the restaurant. I remember we had a nice place for the chickens. At the time my mother was working for the American Sanitary Laundry. And, oh, we had lovely eggs all the time. We had those little red hens. I remember that.

GG: What kinds of canned goods did you carry in the grocery store?

VM: We carried mostly corned beef, vienna sausages, tomato sauce, peas. The things that most of the people used for stews. To make hash. Tuna. Corned beef hash. Not all the fancy kind of canned goods that you see now, you know.

GG: I just wondered though, were there any special canned goods for the special ethnic groups or did you carry?

VM: Yes. My dad also got us some Filipino kind of things for the Filipino population, you know. Like the bagoong. And certain kind of things that came from the Philippines. He bought it from the Ocampo's. It provides--in fact, they're still the outlet I think.

GG: What about now, did you carry anything say for the Japanese population?

VM: Yes.

GG: Do you remember....

VM: We had the canned goods that they used to have--fish cake in the can. Squid in the can. A lot of them that they still have now. They had it in those days.

(Husband enters. Exchange of greetings.)

END OF SIDE TWO.

Tape No. 3-55-2-78

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Mrs. Virginia Mansinon (VM)

June 9, 1978

Kahaluu, Oahu, Hawaii

BY: Gael Gouveia (GG)

GG: This is an interview with Mrs. Mansinon in her home in Kahaluu and today is June 9, 1978. The interviewer is Gael Gouveia.

I thought maybe tonight we would talk a little bit about---your husband is from Kakaako too? Is that correct?

VM: No, he's originally from Kauai. But then, when he came down Honolulu, they lived somewhere in the Honolulu district, where the Princess Theatre was. I don't really know exactly where he lived. And then, he moved down to Kakaako later. I think he was in his early teens when he moved to Kakaako.

GG: When did you meet him? Or how did you meet him?

VM: We were neighbors.

GG: Right next door to each other?

VM: Well, about four houses away.

GG: How old were you at that time?

VM: When we first met each other and talked, I was about 18. He was already working, and supporting his mother. And we were friends, and then, one day, he asked me for a date as I was walking home from work. He had gone to the store for his mother.

And he stopped. He said, "Would you care for a ride?"

I said, "Oh sure." Being a hot day, you know, a ride was welcome. So, he asked me out on a date. And I says, "Well, I have to get my mother's permission before I could say yes." Which I did later, and let him know. And that's how.

GG: Where were you working at that time?

VM: I was working at W. A. Ramsey, Limited. That was situated right across the Honolulu Advertiser.

GG: What were the courtship patterns?

VM: Well, he, being from a very poor family, and his paycheck would go completely to his mother, and she would just give him a little allowance, we didn't go out very much, except for long walks, little drives. Once in a while, we did go out; it would be to a boxing match or to a movie. He didn't own a car, so he had to borrow his brother-in-law's car. But our courtship was very nice. We were engaged within a year, and then we got married.

GG: Was that typical in those days, to be [engaged], perhaps, about a year? Or was there anything that was typical?

VM: I don't think the time had anything to do with it, whether it was typical, or not. What was typical was that before we could get married, before he could even give me an engagement ring, he had gotten my dad's permission. He came over, asked my hand in marriage. He was very, very nervous. As I recall, my mother took me in the bedroom and she said, "You're not to go out there while he's there."

He had a very dear friend--his father had already been dead--so he had a very dear friend representing him. That's Filipino custom; you have a, what you call, a go-between. I think the orientals have that.

GG: Is there a Filipino name for that, or do you know?

VM: There is, but I don't know the name to it. But it's someone to represent. And he goes and talk to my dad. And then, my dad direct his questions to my husband.

GG: But the representative and your husband-to-be were both there?

VM: At the same time, yes. But the representative usually tells my dad what he's there for, why they're there. And then my dad questions my husband-to-be. Then he gives his permission or he gives his denial on that.

And I was in the bedroom trying to listen to every question my dad had. There were times when I was very angry because I thought my dad was very unfair in the questions that he asked. But my mother said, "Just be patient, be quiet." She wasn't out there, she was with me in the bedroom to see I wouldn't interrupt them in any way.

I was of age. I was already 20, my husband was 21. We could have gone out to get married without my parents' permission. But that wasn't nice. We wanted their blessing. And, well, respect was quite important in those days. And regardless whether you were right

or wrong, you always consult your parents and try to make things right. So that there'll always be a happy start in your life. And then, you'll make your parents happy. It may not be what they want, but at least, you respected them by going to them and asking for their permission.

GG: Do you remember what kinds of questions your father asked your husband?

VM: Oh yes. See, at that time I was crippled. And so, he asked my husband, he says, "Well, you know Virginia is sick? She's crippled."

And my husband said, "Yes, I know that."

"Do you think you can take care of her? Because her mother gets up in the middle of the night to treat her, when she's in severe pain."

And he says, "I know I can, because I love her."

"Can you support her? You're supporting your mother, and you're also supporting your two cousins. Can you also support a wife?"

He says, "Yes I can."

"I don't know. I think you're a gambler."

And my husband said, "Why? Why do you say that?"

"Because we work closely together." See, my dad was in the U.S. Engineers. And so was my husband. My dad was a carpenter, my husband was a powderman. And, he says, "At lunch time I saw you gambling."

"Oh, that was just to pass the time. It was just fun." There was nothing to do after you eat your lunch, so the boys played cards.

And my dad says, "Yeah, but I saw money passing hands."

"Yeah, there was money passing hands. But it was just small money, it wasn't big thing. Not big stakes." So, he says, "But I don't make a habit of gambling."

What else? There were other questions, but I couldn't hear them. They weren't very audible, you know.

GG: How far were you from where they were?

VM: Oh, I would say about 20 feet. But my mother kept me away from the door. She was afraid I'd go, and barge into their conversation. You know, especially, when I got angry. So, she made sure I just stayed away from the door. So, I couldn't hear most of the time.

All I knew was that my husband was very, very nervous. I could tell by his voice. Couple of times I opened the door, and took a peek, and I could see him just shaking. Very, very nervous.

GG: How long did that session last?

VM: I can't quite say exactly, but to me, it was an eternity at that time.

(Laughter)

GG: And then how did it end?

VM: Oh, very friendly. My [father] says, "All right. You have my blessings to marry Virginia." And my husband was very relieved, of course. And then I came out of the room, and my dad looked at me. Didn't smile. He was with a straight face, you know, more. I think he had a little smirk on his face. (Laughs) Because he had the satisfaction of putting my husband through an ordeal.

(Laughter)

GG: How long after that did you get married?

VM: I'd say about four months.

GG: Are there special Filipino customs, in terms of in that four-month period?

VM: No. Well, there is, but we never went through those customs. And being that both our parents were poor, they just left everything up to us. So, I made all the preparations. And this very dear friend of his that represented him, paid for the party.

GG: So, where were you married?

VM: I was married at Kawaiahao Church, because I was a member at that church at that time.

GG: And can you tell me about the wedding and the party?

VM: It was a lovely wedding. I had two attendants, and a maid-of-honor, and a flower girl.

GG: Were they family members or friends?

VM: Well, the maid-of-honor was my sister. Flower girl was also my sister, and the two attendants were very, very close friends.

We had a party, a reception, at....they had made a tent right next to my house. And we had Hawaiian food and Filipino food.

GG: What kinds of Filipino food?

VM: It was the typical. Several dishes made with pork and chicken. I can't recall the dishes.

GG: Who did the cooking?

VM: Friends of this man that paid for the party.

GG: Was he from Kakaako also?

VM: Yes. He was....well, I think he was; of course, originally from the Philippines. But he was a very good friend of my husband's. My husband felt like he was almost like an uncle.

And the Hawaiian food was typical. Pig, kalua pig, long rice and chicken, yams. Some raw fish, salmon, that is. That's about it, I think it was.

GG: Approximately how many people did you have attending?

VM: I'd say, I had about 200 people. It wasn't a very, very large reception.

GG: I was going to ask, now, for that time period, was that considered a large wedding?

VM: It was considered a large wedding.

GG: And most of the people who came, were they relatives and friends?

VM: They were relatives and friends. Friends of my husband and myself; people that I worked with at W. A. Ramsey. School friends, neighbors.

GG: So, there were a lot of Kakaako people there then?

VM: Yes.

GG: When you had your babies, did you have a midwife? Or did you go to the hospital, or....

VM: No. I went to Kapiolani Hospital. I had both my children there. Dr. Lyle Phillips--he's already passed away--he was my doctor for my first child. And Dr. Robert Jay--I believe he's gone back to the Mainland--he attended me for my second child.

GG: When you first got married, did you stay in Kakaako, or did you move out right away?

VM: No, we stayed. I moved in to live with my in-laws. My husband was supporting his mother, so I moved in. We didn't leave Kakaako

till....let's see, we remained in Kakaako for 10 years. About 10-1/2 years.

GG: After you were married?

VM: Yes. Yeah, about 11 years anyway. And then we moved up to, oh no, excuse me, I'm sorry. Let's see, I was....I have to backtrack now. We lived in Kalihi six years. Prior to that, we lived in McCully for one year. And then about the first four years of our marriage was in Kakaako. Oh, yes. One year in McCully, on Date Street, and six years in Kalihi. That's on Kalihi and School. And then, we moved out to Kaneohe. We resided there for 13 years, then moved down to Kahaluu.

GG: Let's see now, you got married in 1947, is that right?

VM: Uh huh.

GG: Then, prior to that, during wartime, do you have memories of the war, living in Kakaako? What do you recall?

VM: Yes. I recall December 7. I was attending the Honolulu Bible Training School. At the time, it was in the Hu Building, adjacent to the Honolulu Hale, City Hall. And I was a member of Kawaiahao Church, but I was attending the Honolulu Bible Training School. When we realized what was happening, they dismissed us from Bible school. And I ran into the church grounds, and that was across the street. But then, it was very dangerous there because the planes were strafing the building. So, I ran on all the way home. From Kawaiahao Church all the way down to Ilalo Street in Kakaako. Can you imagine how far that is? But I ran without stopping. I was very, very frightened at that time. I was about 15 years old.

And blackout every night. My dad boarded....did he paint the window? I can't remember whether they painted the windows, or he made some kind of blockades, so the light won't get out. Of course, when he was called in to work, because when they were attacking the islands they had called in all of the federal workers. The defense workers, the U. S. Engineering workers went in. My dad stayed away from home for several months. He lived on the job. And he came home only on weekends, and would go back. He'd stay home only about a day. They'd be working about seven days a week. And they were all given a chance to go home.

And was very frightening because every time we heard gunfire, many times was sentries. We lived near the Fort Armstrong. And when we heard shooting, we'd all get scared and gather around my mother. And then, she'd be frightened too.

On the days when my dad returned home from work--when he was allowed to commute from home to his working place--he then started to build

a bomb shelter right next to our house. It was dug into the ground, and then fortified with sand bags. And, whenever there was a....what you call that now--an alert--we'd all run into there (the shelter). And there were times when it was filled with water, because we lived near the ocean. Being on that Ilalo Street, used to be underwater at one time, many, many years ago. It was all filled land. So, there were times when the water was up to our ankles. But we remained there because we were so frightened.

GG: What kinds of things did you have in the shelter with you?

VM: In the shelter? We didn't keep the things in the shelter because it was very damp. So my mother would take in water, and some canned goods. She had it all in a box. Whenever the alert was, she'd carry it down with her. Some first aid things that she felt might be needed. You know, aspirins and bandages, and things like that. She'd carry it in with her.

GG: How long did you usually have to stay in there?

VM: Not very long. I can't recall the longest time we stayed in there. But it was, to me, never more than 15 minutes. I may be wrong, but it wasn't....at that time, it may have appeared very, very long. But those were mostly alerts. But we couldn't be sure, so.

GG: How big was the shelter?

VM: It was very small. Because my dad didn't have very much land. That wasn't his property, and there wasn't too much land right next to the house to dig. Because the road was right next to it.

GG: And how many of you had to fit inside?

VM: Seven of us. Seven, with my mother eight, my grandmother nine. Nine of us, not counting my dad. If he's there, then would be 10.

GG: And approximately how deep was it? Do you remember?

VM: We couldn't really stand up straight. We were crouched over a little bit. Because it was difficult for my dad to make a real, you know, nice one. He didn't have the materials, to begin with. He had to use whatever he had.

GG: Did he dig it all by himself? Or did he have somebody else to help him?

VM: Oh, my brothers helped him. They were young, but they were able to help him. Most of it was done by himself.

GG: How long did it take him to finish it?

VM: I can't remember. But it was quite a while because he could only do it on the days that he wasn't working.

GG: What did you do when they had alerts, before it was finished?

VM: We just remained in the house. Very nervous.

GG: I can imagine. Okay, you had talked about the Opportunity School before. Do you recall where it was?

VM: It was located right across the street from where we were living. On Ilalo Street; Ilalo and Cooke Streets. That school was for slow learners. I really wish they had something like that today, to help many of these slow children. It's so difficult when you mix them up with the regular learners. Or the very, very....what would you say....gifted children. It's very hard for them.

So whenever they found, these kids were taken out of the elementary school level. Because right at that level, you could find out whether they were slow or not. And they were helped at that level. I know, there were about two boys that was in my class, in the third grade. We went into the fourth grade, they still weren't progressing. So they finally had to move them down to that Opportunity School. And there, they had special teachers who would deal with these slow children.

GG: Did the kids come in from all different elementary schools?

VM: From all elementary schools, from all over Honolulu.

GG: Do you have any idea how long that lasted?

VM: They closed down just before the war started. I don't know why they did it. I can't remember right now, why they decided to close the school. I guess the Department of Education decided that the children could be helped (at a regular school).

GG: But it wasn't for delinquents, it was for kids that had some kind of learning problems.

VM: Yes. There might have been some delinquents there too. But I don't think it was set up for that reason.

GG: Do you recall where Ah Leong Block was? Or are you familiar with that block?

VM: Ah Leong Block. The name is familiar. My mother would be the one who remembers all of those things. Because I always heard her talking about it.

GG: Were you involved at all, or do you know anything about the various sports programs that were available in Kakaako?

VM: There were sports programs right in the Mother Waldron Park. I know because my brother played basketball. And they had teams set up in different districts. I don't know if you're aware, in Kalihi, in Kaimuki. And then they had games played by the different teams. These programs were set up by the Parks and Recreation, I think it was. I think they also had football. Football and basketball, I think, were the two main sports. And baseball. Those three.

GG: Did you go to any of the games?

VM: If they were played at Mother Waldron, yes. But when they were played in other districts, my mother wouldn't allow us to go.

GG: But your brother went on the team and played against the other teams...

VM: Oh, yes. Yeah.

GG: Do you recall, approximately, what age he was at that time?

VM: Let's see. I believe he was in his early teens. I believe, when he was from 12 years old up, he was already playing in some team.

GG: Did they have any sports programs for women at all? For girls?

VM: No. Not that I recall. If there was, I believe it was....I didn't get into them because my mother didn't believe that the girls should join those teams. They should stay at home. (Laughs) Be more domestic.

GG: Are there other things that you recall, that she believed was sort of proper behavior for young ladies.

VM: Oh, yeah. She believed, whenever there was company, we shouldn't speak unless spoken to. We were not to interrupt any conversation. And whenever we went out to visit, we were just to be still and just sit and not say anything, except to say hello, or answer questions. But never to include ourselves in the conversations.

She felt it was never ladylike to make a telephone call to a boy. She said, "A boy should always be the one to call on the girl. Never the girls to make the calls, telephone calls." And, she always believed that a boy should come to the house to pick the girl up to take her out.

Now that was impossible in our case, because my dad didn't want us to go out. So, I met my husband on the sly. My mother knew about it, though. (I guess she always favored my husband.) Because she

gave me the permission to go out with him. But she said, "You know how your dad feels about it. You have to be home early, so as not to create any problems." So, whenever I came home, my husband always drop me about a block away from home. Because he made sure...not really a block, about half a block. He could see me as I was safely going up the stairs, then he was contented to drive (or walk the rest of the way home, which was just four houses away).

GG: Where did your father think you were?

VM: My dad was always on the porch, smoking his cigar. He always asked my mother. Never asked me, he asked my mother, "Where's our daughter?"

And my mother would say, "Oh, she's out with a friend." And he always thought it was a female friend.

GG: Were there any of these, sort of traditions, that the kids in your family rebelled against, or were resentful of?

VM: Uh huh. They were resentful of the fact that my dad had to give his approval before they went out. They didn't like that very much. I remember the first boy that came up to the house. In spite of the fact that I told him, "I think my dad is going to throw you out." He didn't believe me. We were going to a ball game. It wasn't my husband, it was before I ever went with him. Just a friend. I didn't want to go out with him but he was hounding my brother for a date with me. And finally, my brother got so angry, he says, "Go out with him at least once."

So I said, "All right. I'll talk to him about it." So I says, "I'm going to have to meet you at the Honolulu Stadium."

He says, "No, I'll come and pick you up."

I says, "No, you're going to be thrown out. Dad don't want us to go out with boys." Although I was already 17 years old (1943).

Then he says, "All right, I'll meet you at Honolulu Stadium, right near the ticket counter."

So I got ready. And my dad asked me, "Where are you going?"

"Oh, football game."

"Whose playing?"

"Oh, McKinley is playing so."

He says, "Okay. Be home right after the game."

I says, "All right. I'll be home right after the game."

Then there was a knock on the door. I was still getting ready. And my dad went out to answer, and this boy says, "Well, I'm here to take Virginia to the ball game."

And my dad says, "Oh no you're not. I didn't give her permission to." And he says, "You get away from here because my daughter is not going to the ball game with you."

And so I came to the door real fast. And I said, "But Dad, I said I was going with him. It's not his fault." But of course, I didn't tell my dad I was going to meet him at the stadium.

But my dad said, "You never got my permission." He says, "You're not going to the ball game. With him or by yourself. You're not going to the ball game." So, I wouldn't have gone anyway. I wouldn't have enjoyed it.

And instead of being very nice and talking rationally with the boy, my dad has a habit of yelling, you see. And that's when I didn't, I felt so embarrassed, you know. And I apologized to the boy. My dad didn't like it. He says, "You don't have to apologize for my actions." Of course he said it with his accent.

Then, the boy said he was sorry, and he left. And I never went out with him again. He sent a gift to me, on Christmas that year. I returned it. And he wrote a note. He said, if I wouldn't accept it, he'd feel very bad. He said it was just Christmas and he wanted to be nice, and he was very sorry about what happened. He believed that destroyed his chances. Of course, he never had (chance) with me. He didn't know that. I was just being nice.

Oh, I guess that's my family that's coming. You want to turn that off? [Taping stops, then resumes.]

GG: I can't recall if I asked you before, where you took the hula lessons that you had.

VM: Oh, it was at a studio called Lalani Hawaiian Village. It was located in Waikiki. It's already torn down. That's when Waikiki was so beautiful, you know. With no tall buildings, only coconut trees. And it was owned by a Mr. Mossman. I've forgotten his first name. His daughters helped him in instruction. And he was very strict, and a very good teacher. I was always glad I had gotten instruction from him.

GG: Was it like a hula halau, or a group? Did you learn the old-style dances?

VM: We learned a little bit of the old style, and some of the modern.

And his studio, it's like a Hawaiian village. He had little Hawaiian huts. And when we graduated, the stage was right there on the grounds of this Hawaiian village that he had.

GG: Did you have, like a regular uniki, when you graduated?

VM: Yes, yes. We had a luau and everything right there.

GG: I understand, there were quite a few hula teachers that lived in Kakaako, and that they had quite a few hula groups. Was there a reason why you didn't study in Kakaako?

VM: Because at that time, Mossman was the best. And my dad wanted me to have the best. And so, I used to take the streetcar all the way to Waikiki. My dad went with me the first time to show me where it was. And then, later on, I went by myself.

GG: And how old were you at that time?

VM: I was nine years old (1935).

GG: And how long did you study hula then?

VM: I don't remember how long it was. But I completed it. Because I still have my little certificate. And that's when they gave me a Hawaiian name. Because you couldn't graduate unless you had a Hawaiian name. And so Mr. Mossman gave me the name of Keala, which is fragrance.

GG: Were there mostly Hawaiians in your group that were taking...

VM: No, they were all mixed. There were even some haole women taking hula lessons there.

GG: Did you have a mixed age group taking too?

VM: Yes, there was a mixed age group.

GG: And after you graduated, did you go out and dance...

VM: I only danced for the schools, when they had their May Day programs. And I danced at my dad's society; Also for parties, family parties. And then, as I grew older, when I began working at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, I also danced for their Aloha Week programs and their different aloha functions, when some of the people retired or left the islands--you know, some of the officers left to go back. They were reassigned to the Mainland. We would have parties, and I would entertain. Like dancing, singing.

GG: How did you learn to sing?

VM: I guess it came naturally. My mom has a beautiful voice. I never took lessons, but I love singing. And I love singing better than I do dancing. Dancing wasn't the thing I wanted to do. It was just to please my dad. When your dad say you're going to do, you do it. Those days.

(Laughter)

GG: You had told me before, I think, that you became a Protestant at the age of 15. Was that it?

VM: Uh huh.

GG: I see. Did you attend Saint Agnes before that?

VM: Yes. I attended Saint Agnes. I also attended catechism, when I was young. But I was very, very unhappy. I was always full of questions and never satisfied by their answers. This is why, I believe, I became a Protestant. Because I was really still searching.

GG: Did either of your parents go to the Catholic church?

VM: No. I went because my grandmother went to Saint Agnes. She was a very avid member there. My dad and mom never....well, my dad was a Protestant. And then, my mother became a Protestant, too. So when I became a Protestant, he was very, very happy.

GG: What about your grandmother? I mean, was she...

VM: She never interfered. She always said, "The Lord was everywhere." And to her, church is the person himself. If you gathered more than one person together, you're a church. Which is true, that's what the Bible tells you. And she never told us what church to go to. As long as we believed in the Lord and relied on him as a source. She said, "That's the way to live. And always respect the Lord as being the Supreme Being. And be afraid of him, as well as loving him." And she always said, "Whenever you doubtful about whether you doing the right thing or the wrong thing, always ask yourself, 'Am I pleasing the Lord?' If your answer is yes, then you know you're going to please your parents. But if the answer is no, if you're not pleasing the Lord, you're not going to please your parents, or anyone else." She said, "That's your guide." And I've always remembered that.

GG: Now, did you have family parties, or celebrations?

VM: Oh, we've always had family parties. We still do, until this day.

GG: And, were they large gatherings?

VM: They were large gatherings, yeah.

GG: What kind of occasions did you have the parties for?

VM: Mostly birthday parties. And on Christmas and New Year's. Thanksgiving, and Easter. Those were the times.

GG: Can you recall, say in Kakaako, some of those gatherings? What kind of things did you folks do?

VM: Oh, we had the regular fare. You know, if it's Thanksgiving, it'll be turkey. And then, we would all gather together and have a feast. Even after we got married, we would all gather at my mother's.

GG: When you were younger, when you were still in school, did you do that then. too?

VM: When we were younger....only on Christmas, Thanksgiving and New Year's. We just have a little family dinner. We were all growing up at the time, and we couldn't have parties. Not too many parties.

GG: But did other relatives come sometimes, and maybe potluck?

VM: No. Not until after we were grown, and we were working. Then, we start these parties.

GG: But when you were real young, did you celebrate Christmas... say, when you were in elementary school?

VM: My mother made sure that we had something on Christmas. Even though my dad was sole supporter, she always found a little something for us to celebrate with. And I was very thrifty. I saved every penny I had. Whenever anybody gave me a nickel, or dime, or say, when I was in intermediate school, the money that my mother gave me to ride the bus--at that time, we had trolley buses--I would save that money. And I would walk all the way to school, from Kakaako all the way to Washington Intermediate School.

GG: My goodness, that's a long way.

VM: That's a long way. Just to save that nickel in the morning, and then, that nickel in the afternoon. I put it away, and I'd save that money. And at Christmas, I'd spend it on the family. I'd buy my sisters and brothers Christmas gifts.

GG: Did you have a Christmas tree at that time?

VM: Yes. My mother always managed to put something aside so she could purchase a Christmas tree. I remember, during the war years when we couldn't get a Christmas tree, she went out and got a pine tree.

GG: From out in the country somewhere?

VM: No. One of these pine trees, across the school grounds they used to have pine trees growing. We'd go cut a branch, rather, she'd go cut a branch and that was it.

GG: Were there any special, like Filipino holidays or Portuguese holidays, that you celebrated as a family?

VM: No, we didn't. Although there was, but we didn't.

GG: Did you ever go to the Holy Ghost festivals?

VM: No. My grandmother did. Being that she was a very faithful Catholic, she went to those celebrations. And I remember, the Catholic priests used to come over to visit her. And on Holy Ghost days, I guess they would sell pork, or some kind of...

GG: Right. Meat and sweetbread.

VM: Yeah. And then it would be delivered to the house.

GG: And what about the bon dances, now. Did you ever go?

VM: I never went to bon dances. My younger sisters did; it was always something nice to watch. But I wouldn't be dancing in it. But my sisters and brothers would dance.

GG: I understand they used to have merry times or get-to-gether's at, like, Kawaiahao Court, or at Magoon Block, I think. Did you ever go to any of those?

VM: No. I didn't.

GG: And going back even further, you had mentioned that you had gone to Muriel Kindergarten. Where was that located?

VM: On Ilaniwai Street. Was near the Hawaiian Mission, the Kakaako Mission, rather. It was adjacent to it.

GG: And Hawaiian Mission and Kakaako Mission, is that the same thing?

VM: That's the same thing, yeah. I keep referring it to Hawaiian Mission, when I really mean Kakaako Mission.

GG: And do you have any particular memories of going to kindergarten there?

VM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I was afraid of going to school. There's a reason for that. My dad taught me to read and write when I was very, very little. I think I was only two years old, three years old. I knew how to read and write. I mean I knew how to spell my name and write the alphabet and numbers. And my dad always taught me at a table, and very, very strictly. And I was always very

nervous because he scolded me whenever I made mistakes. So I thought that was what school was like. So, when I had to go to the kindergarten, I refused to. I was very, very nervous. And so, my mother explained to the principal at the kindergarten, why I was so afraid. And they understood and they were very nice to me, and I found that school wasn't at all like it was the way my dad taught me.

(Laughter)

VM: Then I began to enjoy kindergarten. But at first I cried every morning. I didn't want to go. Then I realized, after a few days, it wasn't very long; I realized that school wasn't at all what I thought it was.

GG: Did he teach all the children in your family?

VM: No, I was the only one he taught. And then he held me responsible for teaching my brothers and sisters. Or at least guiding them, seeing that they did their homework and things like that.

GG: And did he sit down with you every night, when he was teaching you?

VM: Uh huh. So I read at an early age. I started reading at a very early age.

GG: Do you remember anything about politics in Kakaako?

VM: Yes. My mother was a strong Republican. She was a member of the Republican Party. And whenever it was time to campaign, she was always out there with her little leaflets, handing them out. And whenever she'd attend a rally, she would take us with her. They were wonderful rallies. I wish they had them again. With all the music and everything. We looked forward to those times.

GG: Where did they usually hold the rallies?

VM: The rallies were held at Mother Waldron Park. The voting booths were in the Pohukaina School.

GG: Do you remember hearing any particular candidates?

VM: Yes. I remember hearing Wilson. Mayor Wilson, now what was his first name? I can't remember it.

GG: John.

VM: John Wilson. I believe he's responsible for the tunnels, or something. He being an engineer for the Pali Road and what. I think I remember a little about that. I remember the Kings, Blaisdell. Oh, many others.

GG: And do you remember who did the entertainment at the rally?

VM: Oh, the person I loved to listen to at that time was Lena Machado. I always went to the rallies just to listen to her sing. And I think that's what made me want to sing a lot of Hawaiian tunes. Because I loved her singing.

GG: Did you belong to a choir, or something, at Kawaiahao Church?

VM: Yes. I sang in the Kawaiahao Church choir one year. And, I also sang for the branch. We had a small branch in Kakaako, which we called Paoakalani Branch of Kawaiahao Church. They had branches in different districts. I also sang for their little choir.

GG: Where was the branch?

VM: The branch was located on Cooke Street, right opposite the little grocery store that we owned. I sang at the church meetings.

GG: Do you know why they had the branch in that district, when actually it's so close to where Kawaiahao Church was?

VM: Well, Kawaiahao Church is the mother church. And each district, like Kalihi had their own branch; Kaimuki had their own branch; Nuuanu had their own branch; and Kakaako had their own branch. Kakaako branch happened to be Paoakalani Branch. And then all these branches met at the main church. We had our little meetings and Sunday School in the morning. And their children didn't have to travel too far to go to the main church. You know, some of them lived so far. To go to Sunday School at Kawaiahao, it was a little bit too much for the little ones. So, they had these little branches around.

That way, they were able to win members. Just the neighborhood people would come to these little branch churches. And from there, they would go on to the mother church, which was Kawaiahao.

GG: Do you remember approximately how many people attended the Paoakalani...

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

VM: About 50 people, (not all) members, at that time.

GG: And were these adults and children?

VM: Adults and children.

GG: I see. And what nationalities?

VM: Most families, you know. Predominantly Hawaiian. But I love the Hawaiians, so I enjoyed all the meetings.

GG: Were you the only Filipino that was....

VM: We were the only Filipino family that joined that branch.

GG: And how did the Hawaiians react, or....

VM: Oh, they just welcomed us. Didn't matter what race you were, they just welcome anyone who wanted to join the church.

GG: Through your church association, now, did you do other things with Hawaiian people too?

VM: No. No. Only the functions of the church. Which was to sing, attend meetings, and that's about it; church meetings.

GG: Looking back now, is there anything else that you'd really like to talk about, that perhaps, I haven't asked because I didn't know, as far as Kakaako is concerned. Memories that you have.

VM: The memories that I have about a particular place, like Kakaako, was that everybody, whether you were related or not, you felt related. Whether you were Japanese, Portuguese, Filipino, Hawaiian, you felt so close, as long as you knew each other. If a stranger came into the district, we'd know. And, oh, I guess they would feel like, they would feel uncomfortable. Because we'd all be looking at him, staring at him. I guess we weren't as friendly as we would be to those right around...

GG: But do you know what it was that made you feel like a family? Can you say?

VM: I don't know. I guess because it's not as it is today. Like now, people aren't as close as they were. Thank goodness, I have good neighbors. We're very, very close. Whenever we're going on a trip, they watch the place for me. And we love each other here. And this is the place I felt close. Other areas, Kaneohe, I didn't have that closeness with the neighbors. Fortunately, my mother was my neighbor. So, at least, I had that closeness there.

But here, we're friends. This is the closest I felt, to the way I felt in Kakaako. Because they're concerned for me, and I'm concerned for them. You know? And didn't have this concern in Kalihi. And didn't have this concern in McCully. Or in Kaneohe. But I have it here in Kahaluu, that (feeling closeness) I had in Kakaako. Where we're concerned for the next door neighbor. And we're watching out for them, making sure that they're comfortable, they're happy.

And we could leave our doors open, and not worry about anybody coming in.

GG: And do you know, now, was that sense of feeling, throughout the community? Or maybe just in your area?

VM: Probably in my area. You know, you're closer to the ones you close by. And then maybe other areas they had their own little groups that they were close by. But whenever we saw each other on the street, we were very happy. It's like, not seeing a relative for a while. And then, all of sudden, you see them at the store and you have this sense of happiness in you. You know? (Love....family kind of love. Hawaiians have a phrase that may sum it up--- "aloha pumehana.")

GG: Okay. Well, I think, unless there's anything else that you want to mention, that I haven't asked you about.

VM: No. Not right now. Maybe after I read through what you've done, what you have already set up here, I might think about something. I'll jot it down.

END OF INTERVIEW

REMEMBERING KAKA'AKO: 1910-1950

Volume I

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